

DEATH

AND AFTERWARDS

EDWIN ARNOLD, M.A., C.S.I.



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REPRINTED FROM THE "FORTNIGHTLY REVIEW"
OF AUGUST 1885

With a Supplement

BY

EDWIN ARNOLD, M.A., C.S.I.

AUTHOR OF "THE LIGHT OF ASIA"

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1887

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"Διὸς ἔμερος οὐκ εὐθήρατος ἐτύχθη."

ÆSCH. *Suppl.*

"Unto this day it doth my hertē boote
That I have had my worlde, as in my time."

CHAUCER.

"Never the spirit was born, the spirit will cease to be never ;
Never was time it was not ; End and Beginning are dreams !
Birthless and deathless and changeless remaineth the spirit for ever ;
Death hath not touched it at all, dead though the house of it seems !"

The Song Celestial.



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PREFACE.

MANY correspondents, at the time of the appearance of this paper in the *Fortnightly Review* for August 1885, and since, having earnestly urged upon me its republication, I now comply with their desire; not, however, considering the brief statements and arguments it contains to possess any higher value than that of casual speculation and suggestion.

EDWIN ARNOLD.

LONDON, *September* 1887.

DEATH—AND AFTERWARDS.



MAN is not by any means convinced as yet of his immortality. All the great religions have in concert, more or less positively, affirmed it to him ; but no safe logic proves it, and no entirely accepted voice from some farther world proclaims it. There is a restless instinct, an unquenchable hope, a silent discontent with the very best of transitory pleasures, which perpetually disturb his scepticism or shake his resignation ; but only a few feel quite certain that they will never cease to exist. The vast majority either put the question aside, being absorbed in the pursuits of life ; or grow weary of meditating it without result ; or incline to think, not without melancholy satisfaction, that the death of the

body brings an end to the individual. Of these, the happiest and most useful in their generation are the healthy-minded ones who are too full of vigour or too much busied with pleasure or duty, to trouble themselves about death and its effects. The most enviable are such as find, or affect to find, in the authority or the arguments of any extant religion, sufficing demonstration of a future existence. And perhaps the most foolish are those who, following ardent researches of science, learn so little at the knees of their “star-eyed” mistress as to believe those forces which are called intellect, emotion, and will, capable of extinction, while they discover and declare the endless conservation of motion and matter.

If we were all sure, what a difference it would make! A simple “yes,” pronounced by the edict of immensely developed science; one word from the lips of some clearly accredited herald sent on convincing authority, would turn nine-

tenths of the sorrows of earth into glorious joys, and abolish quite as large a proportion of the faults and vices of mankind. Men and women are naturally good ; it is fear, and the feverish passion to get as much as possible out of the brief span of mortal years, which breed most human offences. And many noble and gentle souls, which will not stoop to selfish sins, even because life is short, live prisoners, as it were, in their condemned cells of earth, under what they deem a sentence from which there is no appeal, waiting in sad but courageous incertitude the last day of their incarceration ; afraid to love, to rejoice, to labour, and to hope, lest love shall end in eternal parting, gladness in the cheerless dust, generous toils in the irony of results effaced, and hope itself in a vast and scornful denial. What a change if all these could really believe that they are cherished guests in an intermediate mansion of a benign universe, not doomed captives in one of its

mournful dungeons! How happy as well as fair and attractive this planet would become if it were not a doctrine, not a theory, not a poetic dream, but a fact seen and accepted, that Death arrives, not like “Monsieur de Paris,” to strip the criminal, to clip his collar and hair, and lop away from him life and love and delight; but as a mother lulling her children to sleep, so that they may wake ready for play in the fresh morning; as the gentlest angel of all the many ministers of man, bringing him far more than birth ever brought; and leading him by a path as full of miracles of soft arrangement, and as delicately contrived for his benefit as is the process of birth itself, to heights of advanced existence, simple, nevertheless, in their turn and order as are the first drops of the breast-milk of his mother, and neither more nor less wonderful!

There is no new thing to say hereupon, even if one should personally and sincerely declare he was quite sure he had always existed, and

should never cease to be. That would be worth nothing philosophically, nor be rendered a whit more valuable even if the speaker should have studied all the creeds, and mastered all the systems, and feel himself led by something beyond them to state the assurance which none of all these can give, or take away. Good-will may recommend a conviction, but cannot possibly impart it. Yet there are reflections, disjoined from all conventional assertions and religious dogmas, which may be worth inditing, rather as suggestions to other minds than arguments ; rather as indications of fresh paths of thought than as presuming to guide along them. And the first which occurs is to represent the great mistake of refusing to believe in the continuity of individual life because of the incomprehensibility of it. Existence around us, illuminated by modern sciences, is full of antecedently incredible occurrences ; one more or less makes

no logical difference. There is positively not a single prodigy in the ancient religions but has its every-day illustration in Nature. The transformations of classic gods and goddesses are grossly commonplace to the magic of the medusa, which is now filling our summer seas with floating bells of crystal and amethyst. Born from the glassy goblet of their mother, the young hydrozoon becomes first a free germ resembling a rice grain ; next a fixed cup with four lips ; then those lips turn to tentacles, and it is a hyaline flower ; which presently splits across the calyx into segments, and the protean thing has grown into a pine-cone crowned with a tuft of transparent filaments. The cone changes into a series of sea-daisies, threaded on a pearly stalk ; and these, one by one, break off and float away, each a perfect little medusa, with purple bell and trailing tentacles. What did Zeus or Hermes ever effect like that ? Does anybody find the Doctrine of the Incarnation so

incredible? The nearest rose-bush may rebuke him, since he will see there the aphides, which in their wingless state produce without union creatures like themselves; and these again, though uncoupled, bring forth fresh broods, down to the tenth or eleventh generation; when, on a sudden, winged males and females suddenly result, and pair. Or is the Buddhist dogma of immortality in the past for every existent individual too tremendous a demand? The lowest living thing, the *Protamœba*, has obviously never died! It is a formless film of protoplasm, which multiplies by simple division; and the specimen under any modern microscope derives, and must derive, in unbroken existence from the *amœba* which moved and fed forty œons ago. The slime of our nearest puddle lived before the Alps were made!

It is not, therefore, on account of the incredibility of a conscious life after death that sensible people should doubt it. I stood last

year in the central aisle of the Health Exhibition at South Kensington, and observed a graceful English girl lost in momentary interest over the showcase containing the precise ingredients of her fair and perfect frame. There—neatly measured out, labelled, and deposited in trays or bottles—were exposed the water, the lime, the phosphorus, the silex, the iron, and other various elements, perversely styled “clay,” which go to the building up of our houses of flesh and bone. As I watched her half-amused, half-pensive countenance, the verse came to mind, “Why should it seem to you a wonderful thing, though one rose from the dead?” Minerals and gases have, so science opines, a kind of atomic and ethereal life in their particles, and if we could only imagine them conversing elementally, how sceptical they would be that any power could put them together in the coarse ingredients of that glass case, so as to form by delicate chemistry of Nature the youthful beauty,

the joyous health, the exquisite capacities, and the involved human life of the bright maiden who contemplated with unconvinced smiles those alleged materials of her being! But if, passing behind such an every-day analysis of the laboratory, science had dared to speak to her of the deeper secrets in Nature which she herself embodied and enshrined—without the slightest consciousness or comprehension on her part—how far more wonderful the mystery of the chemistry of her life would have appeared! Some very grave and venerable F.R.S. might, perchance, have ventured reverently to whisper: “Beautiful human sister! built of the water, the flint, and the lime; you are much more marvellous than all that! Your sacred simplicity does not and must not yet understand your celestial complexity! Otherwise you should be aware that, hidden within the gracious house made of those common materials—softly and silently developed there by forces

which you know not, and yet govern, unwittingly exercising a perpetual physiological magic—are tiny golden beginnings of your sons and daughters to be. You have heard of and marvelled at Iliads written on films of fairy thinness, and enclosed within nutshells! Diviner poems, in infinitely finer characters, upon far subtler surfaces, are inscribed upon each of those occult jewels of your destined maternity! The history of all the vanished lives of those to whom, by many lines and stems, you are the charming heiress—from their utmost heights of mental reach to their smallest tricks of habit and feature; from passions and propensities to moles and birth-marks—are occultly recorded in the invisible epigraph of those enchanted germs, to be more or less developed when the flame on that new altar of later life, of which you are the sacred priestess, brings to reproduction such miraculous epitomes.” She would not, and could not, under-

stand, of course; yet all this is matter of common observation, the well-established fact of heredity by pangenesis, certain though incomprehensible. What, therefore, is there to be pronounced impossible, because of our blindness, in regard to endless continuity and developments of individuality, when out of the holy ignorance of such maidenly simplicity there can be thus subtly and steadfastly prepared the indescribable beginnings of motherhood? If one result of each human life should be to produce, more or less completely, a substantial, though at present invisible, environment for the next higher stage—while handing on, by collateral lives, the lamp of humanity to new hands—that would not be really more strange than the condensation of the oak-tree in the acorn, or the natural sorcery of the contact of the milt and the spawn. “Miracles” are cheap enough!

Another consideration having some force, is that we should find ourselves speculating about

this matter at all. All the other aspirations of infancy, youth, and manhood turn out more or less, as time rolls, to have been prophecies. Instincts explain and justify themselves, each by each. The body foresees and provides for its growth by appetite; the mind expands towards knowledge by childish curiosity; the young heart predicts, by the flushed cheek and quickening pulse, that gentle master-passion which it has not yet learned even to name. There is a significance, like the breath of a perpetual whisper from Nature, in the way in which the theme of his own immortality teases and haunts a man. Note also that he discusses it least and decides about it most dogmatically in those diviner moments when the breath of a high impulse sweeps away work-a-day doubts and selfishnesses. What a blow to the philosophy of negation is the sailor leaping from the taffrail of his ship into an angry sea to save his comrade or to perish with him! He has never

read either Plato or Schopenhauer—perhaps not even that heavenly verse, “Whoso loseth his life for my sake, the same shall save it.” But arguments which are as far beyond philosophy, as the unconscious life is deeper than the conscious, sufficiently persuade him to plunge. “Love that stronger is than death” bids him dare, for her imperious sake, the weltering abyss; and any such deed of sacrifice and heroic contempt of peril, in itself almost proves that man knows more than he believes himself to know about his own immortality. Every miner working for wife and children in a “fiery” pit; every soldier standing cool and firm for his country and flag in those desert-zarebas of Stewart and Graham, offers a similar endorsement of Walt Whitman’s indignant sentence, “If rats and maggots end us, then alarum! for we are betrayed.”

“Well,” it will be said, “but we *may* be betrayed!” The bottom of the sea, as the

dredging of the *Challenger* proves, is paved with relics of countless elaborate lives, seemingly wasted. The great pyramid is a mountain of bygone nummulites. The statesman's marble statue is compacted from the shells and casts of tiny creatures which had as good a right to immortality from their own point of view as he. Moreover, it may be urged, the suicide, who only seeks peace and escape from trouble, confronts death with just as firm a decisiveness as the brave sailor or dutiful soldier. Most suicides, however, in their last written words, seem to expect a change for the better, rather than extinction; and it is a curious proof of the surviving propriety and self-respect of the very desperate, that forlorn women, jumping from Waterloo Bridge, almost always fold their shawls quite neatly, lay them on the parapet, and place their bonnets carefully atop, as if the fatal balustrade were but a boudoir for the disrobing soul. In regard to the argument of equal

rights of continuous existence for all things which live, it must be admitted. If the bathybius—nay, even if the trees and the mosses—are not, as to that which makes them individual, undying, man will never be. If life be not as inextinguishable in every egg of the herring and in every bird and beast, as in the poet and the sage, it is extinguishable in angels and archangels. What, then, is that specialized existence which, some believe, can and does survive and take new shapes, when the small dying sea-creature drops its flake of pearl to the ooze, when the dog-fish swallows a thousand trivial herring-fry, and when the poet and the sage lie silent and cold?

The reason why nobody has ever answered, or, probably, ever will answer, is that each stage of existence can only be apprehended and defined by the powers appertaining to it. Herein lurks the fallacy which has bred such contempt for transcendental speculations, because

people try to talk of what abides beyond, in terms of their present experience. It is true they must do this or else remain silent ; but the inherent disability of terrestrial speech and thought ought to be kept more constantly in view. How absurd it is, for example, to hear astronomers arguing against existence in the moon or in the sun, because there seems to be no atmosphere in one, and the other is enveloped in blazing hydrogen ! Beings are at least conceivable as well fitted to inhale incandescent gas, or not to breathe any gases at all, as to live upon the diluted oxygen of our own air. Embodied life is, in all cases, the physiological equation of its environing conditions. Water and gills, lungs and atmosphere, co-exist by correlation ; and stars, suns, and planets may very well be peopled with proper inhabitants as natural to them as nut-bushes to us, though entirely beyond the wit of man to imagine. Even here, in our own low degrees of life, how

could the oyster comprehend the flashing cruises of the sword-fish, or he, beneath the waves, conceive the flight and nesting of a bird? Yet these are near neighbours and fellow-lodgers upon the same globe. Of the ingredients of that globe we build our bodies: we speak by agitating its air; we know no light save those few beams of the half-explored solar spectrum to which our optic nerve responds. We have to think in terms of earth-experience, as we have to live by breathing the earth-envelope. We ought to be reassured, therefore, rather than disconcerted, by the fact that nobody can pretend to understand and depict any future life, for it would prove sorely inadequate if it were at present intelligible. To know that we cannot now know is an immense promise of coming enlightenment. We only meditate safely when we realize that space, time, and the phenomena of sense are provisional forms of thought. Mathematicians have made us familiar with at

least the idea of space of four and more dimensions. As for time, it is an absurd illusionary appearance due partly to another illusion, that of the seeming succession of events, and partly to the motion of heavenly bodies, so that by forgetting everything, and by going close to the North Pole and walking eastwards, a man might, astronomically, wind back again the lost days of his life upon a reversed calendar. Such simple considerations rebuke materialists who think they have found enough in finding a "law," which is really but a temporary memorandum of observed order, leaving quite unknown the origin of it and the originator. Even to speak, therefore, of future life in the terms of the present is irrational, and this inadequacy of our faculties should guard us from illusions of disbelief as well as of belief. Nature, like many a tender mother, deceives and puts off her children habitually. We learned from Copernicus, not from her, that the earth went

round the sun ; from Harvey, not from her, how the loving aching heart of man does its work ; from Simpson, not from her, how the measureless flood of human anguish could be largely controlled by the ridiculously simple chemical compound of C_2HCl_3 , or “chloroform.” Men must be prepared, therefore, to find themselves misled as to the plainest facts about life, death, and individual development. We shall inherit the deplorable world-feuds of the past long after they have sufficiently taught their nursery lessons of human effort, valour, patriotism, and brotherhood ; and we shall live in the gloom of ancestral fears and ignorances when the use of them for making man cling to the life which he alone knows has for ages passed away. But, all the time, it is quite likely that in many mysteries of life and death we precisely resemble the good knight Don Quixote, when he hung by his wrist from the stable window, and imagined that a tremendous abyss yawned

beneath his feet. Maritornes cuts the thong with lightsome laughter, and the gallant gentleman falls—four inches! Perhaps Nature, so full of unexplained ironies, reserves just as blithesome a surprise for her offspring, when their time arrives to discover the simplicity, agreeableness, and absence of any serious change, in the process called “dying.” Pliny, from much clinical observation, declared his opinion that the moment of death was the most exquisite instant of life. He writes, “*Ipsæ animæ plerumque fit sine dolore, nonnunquam etiam cum ipsâ voluptate.*” Dr. Solander was so delighted with the sensation of perishing by extreme cold in the snow, that he always afterwards resented his rescue. Dr. Hunter, in his latest moments, grieved that he “could not write how easy and delightful it is to die.” The late Archbishop of Canterbury, as his “agony” befell, quietly remarked, “It is really nothing much, after all!” That expression of

composed calm which comes over the faces of the newly dead may not be merely due to muscular relaxation. It is, possibly, a last message of content and acquiescence sent us from those who at last know a little more about it than ourselves—a message of good cheer and of pleasant promise, not by any means to be disregarded. With accent as authoritative as that heard at Bethany it has seemed to many to murmur, “Thy brother shall live again !”

The fallacy of thinking and speaking of a future life in terms of our present limited sense-knowledge has given rise to extremely foolish visions of “heaven,” and made many gentle and religious minds thereby incredulous. As a matter of observation, no artist can paint even in outline a form outside his experience. Orcagna, in the Campo Santo at Pisa, tried to represent some quite original angels, and the result is a sort of canary-bird with sleeved pinions and a female visage. Man never so

much as imagined the kangaroo and ornithorhynchus till Captain Cook discovered their haunts ; how, then, should he conceive the aspect of angels and new-embodied spirits ? But why should he be sceptical about them because his present eyes are constructed for no such lovely and subtle sights ? We can perceive how very easily our senses are eluded even by lower modes of matter. The solid block of ice, whereon we stood and skated, is just as existent when it has melted into water and become dissipated as steam ; but it disappears for us. The carbonic acid gas, which we could not see, is compressed by the chemist into fleecy flakes and tossed from palm to palm. St. Paul was a much better physical philosopher than the materialists and sceptics when he declared “the things not seen are eternal.” But these invisible, eternal things are not, on account of their exquisite subtlety, to be called “supernatural.” They must belong, in an

ascending yet strictly connected chain, to the most substantial and to the lowest, if there be anything low. The ethereal body, if there be such a garb, which awaits us, must be as real as the beef-fattened frame of an East End butcher. The life amid which it will live and move must be equipped, enriched, and diversified in a fashion corresponding with earthly habits, but to an extent far beyond the narrow vivacities of our present being. We need to abolish utterly the perilous mistake that anything anywhere is “supernatural,” or shadowy, or vague. The angelic Regent of Alcyone—if there be one—in the heart of the Pleiades, is “extra-natural” for us ; but as simple, real, and substantial, no doubt, to adequate perceptions as a Chairman of quarter sessions to his clerk.

Remembering, then, that the undeveloped cannot know the developed, though it may presage and expect it ; remembering that bisulphide of carbon is aware of actinic rays invisible

to us ; that selenium swells to light which is not felt by our organisation ; that a sensitised film at the end of the telescope photographs a million stars we did not see ; and that the magnetic needle knows and obeys forces to which our most delicate nerves are absolutely dull ; it seems within the range, and not beyond the rights, of the imagination to entertain confident and happy dreams of successive states of real and conscious existence, rising by evolution through succeeding phases of endless life. Why, in truth, should evolution proceed along the gross and palpable lines of the visible, and not also be hard at work upon the subtler elements which are behind—moulding, governing, and emancipating them ? Is it enough, together with the Positivists, to foresee the amelioration of the race ? Their creed is, certainly, generous and unselfish ; but since it teaches the eventual decay of all worlds and systems, what is the good of caring for a race

which must be extinguished in some final cataclysm, any more than for an individual who must die and become a memory? If death ends the man, and cosmic convulsions finish off all the constellations, then we arrive at the insane conception of an universe possibly emptied of every form of being, which is the most unthinkable and incredible of all conclusions. Sounder, beyond question, was the simple wisdom of Shakespeare's old hermit of Prague, who "never saw pen and ink, and very wittily said to a niece of King Gorboduc, 'That that is, is!'"

If so very sensible a recluse had gone deeper into that same grand philosophy of common-sense, we might fancy him saying to the niece of his Majesty: "There is an immense deal in this plain fact, fair Princess! that we are alive, and far advanced in the hierarchy of such life as we know. We cannot indeed fly like a bird, nor swim like a dog-fish, nor hunt by smell like

a hound, but—vanity apart—we seem to sit at the top of the tree of visible earth-life, and what comes next ought to come for us.” If there has been a boundless Past leading to this odd little Present, the individual, it is clear, remembers nothing. Either he was not; or he lived unconscious; or he was conscious, but forgets. It may be he always lived, and inwardly knows it, but now “disremembers;” for it is notable that none of us can recall the first year of our human existence, though we were certainly then alive. Instincts, moreover, are bodily memories, and when the newly hatched chick pecks at food, it must certainly have lived somehow and somewhere long before it was an egg. If to live for ever in the future demands that we must have lived for ever in the past, there is really nothing against this! “End and beginning are dreams;” mere phrases of our earthly limited speech. But taking things as they seem, nobody knows that death stays—

nor why it should stay—the development of the individual. It stays our perception of it in another's case ; but so does distance, absence, or even sleep. Birth gave to each of us much ; death may give very much more, in the way of subtler senses to behold colours we cannot here see, to catch sounds we do not now hear, and to be aware of bodies and objects impalpable at present to us, but perfectly real, intelligibly constructed, and constituting an organized society and a governed, multiform State. Where does Nature show signs of breaking off her magic, that she should stop at the five organs and the sixty or seventy elements ? Are we free to spread over the face of this little earth, and never freed to spread through the solar system and beyond it ? Nay, the heavenly bodies which we can discern, for all their majesty, are to the ether which contains them as mere spores of seaweed floating in the ocean. Are the specks only filled with life, and not the

space? What does Nature possess more valuable in all she has laboured to manufacture here, than the wisdom of the sage, the tenderness of the mother, the devotion of the lover, and the opulent imagination of the poet, that she should let these priceless things be utterly lost by a quinsy, or a flux? It is a hundred times more reasonable to believe that she commences afresh with such delicately developed treasures, making them groundwork and stuff for splendid farther living, by process of death; which, even when it seems accidental or premature, is probably as natural and orderly as birth, of which it is the complement; and wherefrom, it may well be, the new-born dead arises to find a fresh world ready for his pleasant and novel, but sublimated, body, with gracious and willing kindred ministrations awaiting it, like those which provided for the human babe the guarding arms and nourishing breasts of its mother. Emerson says so well, speaking of the gentle and ample

birth arrangements made for us here, "We are all born Princes !" As the babe's eyes opened from the darkness of maternal safeguard to strange sunlight on this globe, so may the eyes of the dead lift glad and surprised lids to "a light that never was on sea or land ;" and so may his delighted ears hear speech and music proper to the spheres beyond, while he smiles contentedly to find how touch and taste and smell had all been forecasts of faculties accurately following upon the lowly lessons of this earthly nursery ! It is really just as easy and logical to think such may be the outcome of the "life which now is," as to terrify weak souls into wickedness by mediæval hells, or to wither the bright instincts of youth or love with horizons of black annihilation.

Moreover, those new materials and surroundings of the farther being would bring a more intense and verified as well as a higher existence. Man is less superior to the sensitive-

plant now than his re-embodied spirit would probably then be to his present personality. Nor does anything except ignorance and despondency forbid the belief that the senses so etherealised and enhanced, and so fitly adapted to fine combinations of an advanced entity, would discover without much amazement sweet and friendly societies springing from, but proportionately upraised above, the old associations; art divinely elevated, science splendidly expanding; bygone loves and sympathies explaining and obtaining their purpose; activities set free for vaster cosmic service; abandoned hopes and efforts realized in rich harvests at last; despaired-of joys come magically within ready reach; regrets and repentances softened by wider knowledge, by surer foresight, and by the discovery that, although in this universe nothing can be "forgiven," everything may be repaid and repaired. In such a stage, though little removed relatively from this, the widening

of faith, delight, and love (and therefore of virtue which depends on these) would be very large. Everywhere would be discerned the fact, if not the full mystery, of continuity, of evolution, and of the never-ending progress in all that lives towards beauty, happiness, and use without limit. To call such a life "Heaven" or the "Hereafter" is a temporary concession to the illusions of speech and thought, for these words imply locality and time, which are but provisional conceptions. It would rather be a state, a plane of faculties, to expand again into other and higher states or planes; the slowest and lowest in the race of life coming in last, but each—everywhere—finally attaining. After all, as Shakespeare so merrily hints, "That that is, is!" and when we look into the blue of the sky we actually see visible Infinity. When we regard the stars of midnight we veritably perceive the mansions of Nature, countless and illimitable; so that even our narrow senses

reprove our timid minds. If such shadows of an Immeasurable and Inexhaustible Future of peace, happiness, beauty, and knowledge be but ever so faintly cast from what are real existences, fear and care might, at one word, pass from the minds of men, as evil dreams depart from little children waking to their mother's kiss; and all might feel how subtly-wise he was who wrote of that first mysterious night on earth, which showed the unsuspected stars; when—

. . . . "Hesperus, with the host of heaven, came,
And lo! Creation widened on man's view!

Who could have thought such marvels lay concealed
Behind thy beams, O Sun? or who could find—

Whilst flower and leaf and insect stood revealed—
That to such countless orbs thou mad'st us blind?

Why do we, then, shun death with anxious strife?
If Light can thus deceive, wherefore not Life?"

WHILE the above was in course of re-publication, it was sent to two very distinguished men of science, with a request for their opinion upon the reasonableness, or lack of reason, in its pages. One of them, renowned for his chemical investigations, returned it with expressions of pleasure and of general agreement which have greatly encouraged this reprint. The other, whose name is famous wherever Science is followed, and whose researches in Natural Philosophy confer imperishable lustre on the Victorian era, has honoured the author with a letter, profoundly interesting and suggestive, but which, from its nature and frank confidences, he is not at liberty to quote. It was accompanied, however, by a few memoranda upon the article, written by a highly gifted friend of that illustrious correspondent; and these it is permitted to append. The writer says:

“That which has been ‘born’ must ‘die.’ The two are one: birth and death one event which ‘happens’ to a

being, but which is cleft in twain by a little fissure we call life. . . .

“Why is life a problem at all? Why is there no categorical explanation (of our consciousness of larger life) necessarily accepted by every sound mind or sane intelligence? Is it not because a scientifically exhaustive answer cannot be given in the terms of time and space as we now realize them? When instead of masters they become servants, when instead of blank prison walls they become open doors and pathways, shall we not enter a new mental world, though one firmly linked in continuity with the present?

“We need to translate the facts of physical nature into those of moral, mental, and spiritual nature. We need to repudiate with abhorrence the whole machinery of magic and sorcery and *unnatural* prodigy which we have confounded with that which is most natural, most healthy or holy—most sound and whole; that which is to our mind and conscience what the brain is to our physical structure—its director and its interpreter.

“Most truly Mr. Arnold says that the highest must belong to the lowest in an unbroken chain. And we are often rebuked by finding the highest type of beauty and fitness in the most despised or ‘lowest’ of microscopic organisms or even particles. On the other hand, the visible is not necessarily ‘gross’ except in the sense of coarse-grained—*large* in scale: our whole region of sense-perception may represent but one fibre of the tissue of consciousness.

“Let us try to realize that the current phraseologies only mislead when supposed to embrace *actual fact becoming accessible first to conception, then to consciousness and experience*. The general tendency of observed order seems to suggest that we have a ‘planetary’ consciousness, or one which naturally starts from this earth as a mental centre; that since the Copernican era began we have been gradually developing a ‘solar’ or ‘systematic’ consciousness, and are already beginning to refer many verified facts to a mental ‘sun’ as a centre; and that a complete generalization, or satisfying answer to the problems which as yet baffle us, needs a ‘cosmical’ consciousness, of which indeed the fore-gleams may be discerned in the very questions we ask, in the very doubts suggested to us, in the very paradoxes of which Nature is full. Or we may consider the same order as the cellular, the functional, and the organic consciousness. A nucleated cell might be: (1) conscious of its own nucleus and of the cell-world only; (2) conscious of the ‘heart’ or ‘lung’ to which it belongs; and (3) conscious of the complete Living Organism which is the explanation of the two first, and their *raison d’être*.

“Such a consciousness in the three grades would be strictly related and strictly natural throughout. But of course the second and third would successively appear, and indeed in a true sense would *be*, ‘super’natural (that is, extra-normal) to the first, as long as this first consciousness (the planetary or cellular) was supposed to include and to supply terms for the whole accessible sphere of fact.

“Many other similar illustrations will occur to us. ‘Cellular’ consciousness of the individual ‘I’ may be compared to the first dimension in space—one line only; or to the lowest level in the triad of the physical (or mechanical), the chemical, and the vital as given by Clifford, Littré, and all the host of scientific authorities.

“Or it might be illustrated by the ‘gaseous’ condition (as compared to the liquid and then the solid) of matters—whatever *that* may be—or perhaps to the three responses to light and heat, first surface-reflection, then absorption, then radiation. But of course all this takes us into the dangerous region of analogy—dangerous surely for the very reason that the general consciousness is so embryonic—needing, therefore, rigorous test.

“Let us at least recognize the utter futility of discussion or controversy which treats the average or commonly accepted notions of root-questions at issue as really representative or adequate. No wonder that we cannot make head or tail of this or that, when in the nature of things there are none to make! But it does not follow, because the vertebrate order cannot be properly described in terms of the protozoic, that we should deliberately relapse into ‘agnostic’ bits of jelly, and denounce bone, muscle, or nerve as ‘metaphysic’ or ‘mysticism’—two of the worst of names to hang a dog by. Let us faithfully and patiently cultivate the dawning ‘Copernican’ consciousness. Assuredly we shall thus find all our ideals transformed by being ‘lifted up’ into the Real. And we may be sure

that if our *notions* are rectified and enlarged and deepened, language will soon begin to follow, and their practically fruitful application to problems of conduct, social and individual, will become possible in a sense hitherto despaired of by most of us."

From the same deeply thoughtful mind the subjoined remarks have also been received on the general subject :

"When the Galileo of Time—surely coming—shall have made conceivable if not actually accessible to us, what answers in the temporal sphere to the 'antipodes' we know as spatial fact ; when we have begun to realize that 'past and future' are no more absolute than the 'over and under,' the 'above and below' which now we know to be reversible not only in conception but in physical experience,—*then* perhaps we may alter somewhat our estimate of the comparative value of the local, temporal, sensuous character of a 'fact ;' and our notion of what constitutes its real significance. We shall learn to distinguish between what is sacramental as gift-bringing and representative, and what is merely event-ful or occasion-al. What *comes to pass* must ever pass away, but what is real is not thus gained or lost. A 'fact' in itself as evident to the senses, —*apart from its meaning and effect, from what it conveys and manifests to intelligence*, is like—the black marks upon this paper, or the noises made in speaking. But there is an

undying reality which is conveyed alike through sounds, black marks, &c., or events; through the acts of an individual equally with the narration of such acts, *and most of all, with the conception of them.* That reality, that substance, that precious and eternal treasure, is the Meaning, the Object, the Gist of all we know as fact; timeless, spaceless, yet energetic, creative, fruitful. *This* is the reality of revelation spiritual and material,—and more, Divinely Natural; this is the reality of the Divine in the Human proclaimed through Incarnation; the heavenly in the earthly, the holy and whole-some nature in both.

“Finally, this is the underlying quality of ‘phenomena’ which gives and includes all that makes them worth observation, classification, interpretation, application. This it is which transforms all that is presented to our consciousness—whether as things or laws or occurrences—into *articulate language*; showing us the universe of ‘mind and matter,’ energy and motion, as one vast Message of Order and of Life.

“Do we ask what difference it would make if we realized that in the very nature of things there can be no ‘fundamental basis;’ that there is no permanent fixity anywhere in relation to us except in a secondary sense; that the very notion out of which the metaphor sprung depends on what we now know to be false; that its real origin is the primitive idea of the earth’s being immovably fixed and settled on a Base or absolute foundation? Why, surely, this:

“We have all to learn alike that what seems to us like the

vaguest of vacancies,—that which appears incapable of ‘supporting’ a fly, much less a pebble;—that blank in which there is not even an atmosphere in which to breathe and by means of which to move,—in the last resort *is just all the foundation which we have*. That which safely bears our ‘solid world’ in the gulfs of space is no base or basis, no moveless central ‘rock;’ but throbbing energies in complex and manifold action, in swing and wave and thrill; whirling us onward in mighty sweeps of threefold rhythm *to which our hearts are set*. So therefore not solidity of base or fixity of status is our supreme and vital need, but moving power beyond our ken or senses; known to us in energizing action, and working through blue ‘void;’ impelling us in rings of spiral orbit round a moving sun on which we are dependent.

“What then? Is fact less fact, or life less life, or the real less real for that? No; the revelation of the ‘dynamical’ order succeeds that of the ‘statical,’ only to give fresh and ever fuller witness to the *living* truth; the Way of life itself, like the spinning world, bears us forwards on its bosom, more swiftly than we can journey on it; and even beyond our best there ever rises a better hope,—a hope which can only melt, as the spectrum-colour melts, into the white and perfect Light. The secret of religion, the key to theology, the essence of revelation, is not as we have fancied, a question of fixed centre or immovable foundation or solid support; the world of our faith, the universe of our Spiritual Verity, depends, not upon final or immutable ‘foundations,’

but upon the perfect order and the unchanging might of co-incident forces, of balanced attractions, of undulating impulses, of subtle vibrations, of harmonious rhythm, of spiral progression, of ceaseless and universal movement; in short, upon the supremacy, not of Divine stability, but of Divine Energy. And this entails the transformation of all our spiritual thought and apprehension. Supposing that we had hitherto conceived water to be something which created instead of quenching thirst; supposing we had imagined air to be solid or earth to be vaporous, or confounded the character and use of a coin and a seed, or fancied our blood to be stationary like our bones, cannot we see how fatally our current use of metaphor would have misled us?

“Some of our actual conceptions have perhaps been more like this than we realize. And thus it is with all the pre-scientific ideas and assumptions which we now have, willing or unwilling, to unlearn; thus it is with that vast mass of metaphor which forms the very tissue of our thought and speech.

“But while losing much that we have learnt to cling to, we gain what is a hundred-fold in value, if only we have faith enough to trust God now as *light*. We find that Truth meets *every* need afresh; we find that never can true thought outstrip our CHRIST.] We find our living Way through countless changes; stagnation dies with apathy and dread; a fearless hopeful strength is given to us; we know that nothing now can daunt or harm us. Each ray of light

which science brings, *reveals* : we welcome what in old days terrified us.

“ We grow and grow and feel God’s touch upon us ; we give and give, and yet our store increases ; we feel the breath of coming life and gladness, we see a distant dawn of living radiance. Things which had seemed but dry and dusty bones begin to move, arising ; the out-worn weary words are vivid now ; they beat and glow with quick and pregnant meaning. Let us go forth and greet the coming changes !

“ Let us give up our own effete travesties. Let us be brave and say to the GOD of light, ‘ Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth ; ’ not prescribing or limiting to our pettiness the range and form of the answer, but adding, ‘ Not our will, but thine be done.’ For *then* will come an answer charged with glory. At last the life through death shall stand unveiled. And we shall surely wonder that we could have doubted ; making sorrow barren and pain mere torment ; fighting against the very succour sent us, the witness of the new force of conquering Life.”

These observations seem in a high degree novel, interesting and valuable. They refer chiefly—as will be seen—to that part of the foregoing article which dwells upon the inherent and natural impossibility, at present and in this life—of answering in any language, except that of

the algebra of hope and the calculus of probability, the ever importunate riddle of our existence. But men would be very well satisfied with a provisional answer ; and it is justly recognized above that if there can be no certain proof one way, there can still less be positive disproof the other way. As Omar Khayyâm says in his *Rubaiyat*:

“ A hair, perhaps, divides the False and True
Yes ! and a single Alif were the clue,
Could you but find it, to the Treasure-House,
And, peradventure, to the Master, too ! ”

Each great discovery of Science raises us to a new height from which the horizon of possibilities, physical and extra-physical, perpetually expands ; although scientific minds seem occasionally to miss the truest and best revelation of their own triumphs. There are many excellent savants, for example, who write about Evolution, which explains so much, as if forgetting that it “ cannot explain itself.” Admirably has Mr. Goldwin Smith, in “ Lectures and

Essays," remarked upon this: "With our eyes fixed on the 'Descent,' newly disclosed to us, may we not be losing sight of the Ascent of Man?" And the same accomplished author has the subjoined passage, which bears directly on the matter:

"Suppose spiritual life necessarily implies the expectation of a Future State, has physical science anything to say against that expectation? Physical science is nothing more than the perceptions of our five bodily senses registered and methodized. But what are these five senses? According to physical science itself, nerves in a certain stage of evolution. Why then should it be assumed that their account of the universe, or of our relations to it, is exhaustive and final? Why should it be assumed that these are the only possible organs of perception, and that no other faculties or means of communication with the universe can ever in the course of evolution be developed in man? Around us are animals absolutely unconscious, so far as we can discern, of that universe which Science has revealed to us. A sea anemone, if it can reflect, probably feels as confident that it perceives everything capable of being perceived as the man of science. The reasonable supposition, surely, is that though Science, so far as it goes, is real, and the guide of our present life, its relation to the sum of things is not much more considerable than that of

the perceptions of the lower orders of animals. That our notions of the universe have been so vastly enlarged by the mere invention of astronomical instruments is enough in itself to suggest the possibility of further and infinitely greater enlargement. To our bodily senses, no doubt, and to physical science, which is limited by them, human existence seems to end with death ; but if there is anything in our nature which tells us, with a distinctness and persistency equal to those of our sensible perceptions, that hope and responsibility extend beyond death, why is this assurance not as much to be trusted as that of the bodily sense itself ? There is apparently no ultimate criterion of truth, whether physical or moral, except our inability, constituted as we are, to believe otherwise ; and this criterion seems to be satisfied by a universal and ineradicable moral conviction as well as by a universal and irresistible impression of sense."

And, farther on :

"We are enjoined, sometimes with a vehemence approaching that of ecclesiastical anathema, to refuse to consider anything which lies beyond the range of experience. By experience is meant the perceptions of our bodily senses, the absolute completeness and finality of which, we must repeat, is an assumption, the warrant for which must at all events be produced from other authority than that of the senses themselves. On this ground we are called upon to discard, as worthy of nothing but derision, the ideas of eternity and infinity. But to dislodge these ideas from our

minds is impossible ; just as impossible as it is to dislodge any idea that has entered through the channels of the senses ; and this being so, it is surely conceivable that they may not be mere illusions, but real extensions of our intelligence beyond the domain of mere bodily sense, indicating an upward progress of our nature. Of course if these ideas correspond to reality, physical science, though true as far as it goes, cannot be the whole truth, or even bear any considerable relation to the whole truth, since it necessarily presents Being as limited by space and time.

“ Whither obedience to the dictates of the higher part of our nature will ultimately carry us, we may not be able, apart from Revelation, to say ; but there seems no substantial reason for refusing to believe that it carries us towards a better state. Mere ignorance, arising from the imperfection of our perceptive powers, of the mode in which we shall pass into that better state, or of its precise relation to our present existence, cannot cancel an assurance, otherwise valid, of our general destiny. A transmutation of humanity, such as we can conceive to be brought about by the gradual prevalence of higher motives of action, and the gradual elimination thereby of what is base and brutish, is surely no more incredible than the actual development of humanity, as it is now, out of a lower animal form or out of inorganic matter.”

Yet another erudite friend comments as follows upon “ Death—and Afterwards ” :

“The argument appears to me to place in its strongest form the moral presumption in favour of a continued existence. It is Butler’s *Analogy* purified from the ‘supernatural,’ and brought into harmony with Science. It still leaves on my mind the difficulty, which is perhaps insuperable, of balancing this moral presumption—strengthened confessedly by natural analogies—against the physical evidence at hand of man’s individual destruction, and the negative evidence—or rather negation of evidence—as to the existence of any other state of being. All experience is against attaching much weight to the mere want of evidence, and I would certainly allow a moral presumption to weigh more than a mere negation.

“This presumed, how are we to sum up the argument? That there *may* be a future life, the article establishes beyond doubt. Does it make it equally clear that it is probable there *is* one? It disposes of the illusion of disbelief: does it substitute for it (as Mill thought) the presumption that a future continuance of life is more likely than the annihilation of intelligent beings?

“The thesis would be much strengthened if we were permitted to reason on the probability that purpose underlies the things that are seen. Teleology has been abused, but I think it cannot be wholly set aside, and the force of the analogy is immensely increased if this world be part of a system of things having some intelligent end in view. We cannot answer the inquiry—‘Why preserve matter and motion, and not consciousness and intelligence?’—and the

DEATH—AND AFTERWARDS.

idea is nearly irresistible that they may be preserved in states of existence separable from matter and motion. Suppose that, with the elimination of evils, the perfection of species ensues : is that a sufficient purpose for a solar system? One can hardly think it. There may be vast developments on this sphere, but one cannot help thinking that in some way or other we must be brought by correlation into connection with the rest of the universe.

“One argument herein strikes me as exceedingly strong : ‘Men must be prepared to find themselves misled as to the plainest facts about life, death, and individual development.’ This impresses me as a most important basis of reasoning. It might be read as a caution against hoping for immortality ; for Nature may be misleading us by dangling this bait before us, and the very general diffusion of belief in another world cannot, after all, *per se*, rank much higher than pervading belief in witchcraft and necromancy. But, on the whole, Nature does seem beneficent, and the better is more likely to prove the true, than the worse, or than ‘nothing.’

“I do not think the pretension can be sustained that, because some sorts of life hereafter will or may be continued, therefore all life will or may be so continued. Much of the lower vitalities may be mere scaffolding—steps to the higher and more complex.

“There is, meanwhile, another consideration which adds some strength to the position taken up in the article, that if there be a moral system of development, then uncertainty

as to the future may be an essential condition of it, as our natural ignorance is to the development of the intellectual faculties.

“ While physical science leads without question to agnosticism, I think you have shown that there are moral and intellectual reasons (backed by extremely forcible material analogies) which restore the presumption that a future life is possible, and even probable.”

The point here alluded to, the educational and evolutionary action of our perpetual ignorance, our endless curiosity, our ceaseless effort, has truly much value. It struck Virgil in the same strong light, even as regarded agriculture :

“ Pater ipse, colendi

Haud facilem esse viam voluit, primusque per artem

Movit agros, curis acuens mortalia corda,

Nec torpere gravi passus sua regna veterno.”

How many exquisite devices of Nature are carried to fulfilment in the dark ! In how many ways she coaxes her children of all the kingdoms to her ends, by softly misleading their instincts ! It is, indeed, almost like high treason against her scheme to try to persuade men that death

is nonsense, so urgent is she to have them love their present life, and cling to it, and make the most of it. The philosophers who take so much trouble to teach that "life is not worth living," and yet go on existing and discharging their social duties so admirably, make one think that Nature is rather like the hen-wives in Essex. When a pullet will not sit, these good women pluck off the breast-feathers from the recalcitrant fowls and whip the bare space lightly with nettles; whereupon the hens go straight to the nest to ease their skin against the nice cool eggs; and habit keeps them there, to the benefit of the farm-yard and the poultry market. Pride, doubt, fear, ignorance, ambition, fashion, bodily needs, are all in turn the nettles of Nature.

It seems, of course, very annoying and humiliating to be coerced or cajoled into wisdom and patience; to have to rack our brains for nothing, and find the right life-path chiefly by the thorns which prick us if we wander from

it. Thus many will sympathize with Horace when he says :

“ Quid æternis minorem
Consiliis animum fatigas ? ”

And also with Omar the Potter writing :

“ Ah Love ! Could thou and I with Fate conspire
To grasp this sorry scheme of Things entire
Would we not shatter it to bits, and then,
Re-mould it nearer to our Hearts' Desire ! ”

The chief object of these pages, however, is to suggest that all such complaints are not merely idle, but foolish ; that all our fears are needless, and not one single human hope, expectation, or aspiration is half great enough, or glad enough, or bold enough ; that the secret of the Universe is, after all, an open one, like that of the earth's motion, or any other tardily-made intellectual discovery illuminating the perpetual fact that “ things are not what they seem.” We fear death, but may perhaps find it agreeable, interesting, and coming just at the right time, whenever it comes. For

Goethe it was enough that "it was common." We debate with vast metaphysical periphrasis "past, present, and future," and shall perchance discover—though still short of all ultimates—that there is only an eternal Now. We distress ourself about maintaining our identity and upon remaining individual, when, quite conceivably, the lower angels laugh at our small aspirations herein, and exclaim, "So soon made happy!" May there not be coalesced existences, as immensely higher and better than our little "ego" as that of the tree is than those of the cells which build every inch of it, from rootlet to topmost twig? Pain is, truly, or was, a horrible puzzle; but its physiological and moral uses were always plain; and Science has practically mastered it at last with the benign discovery of anæsthetics. Hatreds, and malignities; selfishnesses, and social evils of all kinds are very dreadful; but they plainly diminish before the light of education. Probably the Talmud legend is right in spirit, which says

that the dimple upon every man's and woman's upper lip was imprinted there by the hand of God, who, in creating all human flesh, whispered, "It is well!" but pressed His finger upon our mouths to prevent us telling each other what we know. And therefore, since poets have the instinct of insight, and see without eyes, it is no wonder to find a modern man like Walt Whitman, who has praised the joys of our life of sense so fluently and heartily, singing of the approach of death as he does in the tender dithyrambs which occur in "The Passage to India," musical words of faith and fearlessness with which these pages shall be embellished.

"DEATH CAROL.

" Come, lovely and soothing Death ;

Undulate round the world ; serenely arriving, arriving,

In the day ; in the night, to all, to each ;

Sooner or later ; delicate Death.

" Praised be the fathomless universe ;

For life and joy ; and for objects and knowledge curious ;

And for love ; sweet love. But praise ! praise ! praise !

For the sure-enwinding arms of cool-enfolding Death.

“ Dark Mother, always gliding near, with soft feet,
Have none chanted for thee a chant of fullest welcome?
Then I chant it for thee—I glorify thee above all;
I bring thee a song that when thou must indeed come,
come unfalteringly.

“ Approach, strong Deliveress!
When it is so—when thou hast taken them, I joyously
sing the dead,
Lost in the loving, floating ocean of thee,
Laved in the flood of thy bliss, O Death.

“ From me to thee glad serenades,
Dances for thee I propose, saluting thee—adornments and
feastings for thee;
And the sights of the open landscape, and the high-
spread sky, are fitting;
And life and the fields, and the huge and thoughtful
night.

“ The night in silence; under many a star;
The ocean shore, and the husky whispering wave whose
voice I know;
And the soul turning to thee, O vast and well-veil’d
Death,
And the body gratefully nestling close to thee.

“ Over the tree-tops I float thee a song!
Over the rising and sinking waves—over the myriad
fields, and the prairies wide:

Over the dense pack'd cities all, and the teeming wharves
and ways,

I float this carol with joy ; with joy to thee, O Death ! ”

One reflection more shall be borrowed from the brilliant pen to which I owe the most striking of the above comments. It is this :

“ I feel more and more how entirely wide of the mark (for want of adopting your view of the illusionary character of time, space, life, death, &c.) must be, and must remain, our controversies as to ‘ personality,’ and the persistence of that force which we know as identity. Such expressions as ‘ immortality,’ as we understand and use them, do not merely fail to cover the ground ; they are but half-thoughts—like the half of a man cloven in two—unless complemented by corresponding terms like ‘ in-natality.’ We think of ‘ eternal life ’ as something which begins but does not end ; but the fallacy of this becomes evident if we try to think conversely of something ‘ eternal ’ which ends though it does not begin.”

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